

# **Christianity in Jerusalem Today**

Raymond Cohen  
Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Boston College

Paper presented to the conference on  
“Christianity and the East: Fostering Understanding”  
Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, May 14-16, 2009

## Introduction

Christianity in Jerusalem has entered its third millennium under the shadow of conflict: Between Islam and the West; between Israelis and Palestinians; and among the Christian communities themselves. Although Christianity as a representative and institutional presence remains stronger than ever in Jerusalem, and pilgrims pour in, Arab Christians are today a small minority in the city.

Looking out over Jerusalem from the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus I have a splendid view of a walled city whose origins are lost in antiquity but which is cherished by the three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It has four quarters: Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Armenian.

Three domes compete for the eye of the beholder: Most prominent is the seventh century golden Muslim Dome of the Rock dominating the Muslim Quarter and built on the site known to Jews and Christians as the Temple Mount, because it was here that the great Hebrew temples of Solomon and Herod stood. Above and to the west at the heart of the Christian Quarter is the dome over the rotunda of the twelfth century Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It was erected by the Latin Crusader Kingdom on the fourth century foundations of the Emperor Constantine’s original church, itself constructed over the Emperor Hadrian’s pagan second century Temple of Aphrodite. Further to the west up the hill is the tower and cupola of the new Hurva synagogue. Almost complete, it stands

at the spot where the main Ashkenazi synagogue of the Jewish Quarter was destroyed by the Arab Legion in 1948. There have reputedly been synagogues here since the second century. Each edifice is a place of worship and glory to God—and a triumphalist monument.

Jerusalem is a city that testifies to religious variety. It also displays the diversity of the Christian world. The Christian holy places of Jerusalem have always been close to the hearts of Christians. Since earliest times Christian pilgrims have sought here tangible witness to the final days of the life of Jesus Christ, raising shrines and monuments on the sites associated by tradition with key events: The Cenacle, site of the Last Supper; the Garden of Gethsemane, the place of Christ's agony; the fourteen stations of the Cross; Golgotha, the place of the Crucifixion; and the site of Christ's Tomb and Resurrection. All major denominations of Christianity have therefore wished to be represented in Jerusalem, from the ancient Eastern Churches of the Armenians, Copts, Ethiopians, Georgians, and Syrian Orthodox; the Eastern Orthodox churches descended from the Royal Church of Byzantium, among which we can mention the Greek, Russian, Serbian, and Romanian Churches; the Roman Catholic Church and eastern rite Catholic Churches—Melkite (Greek), Maronite, Chaldean, and so on; and the Protestant Churches, of which the Anglican and Lutheran are most prominent. Many other Evangelical Churches are represented outside the walls of the Old City.

That Jerusalem, “the city of peace”, has been a locus of international conflict over the centuries is hardly news. Conquest and destruction have been its lot since ancient times. Jerusalem was fought over three times in the twentieth century alone, in 1917, 1948, and 1967. Ever since 1967 its future has been hotly contested between Jews and

Muslims, with Christians caught in the middle. Less well known is the fact that the city today is also at different levels an arena of disputation among some of the Christian denominations mentioned above. The different Churches have competed for theological validation, predominance, and prestige. The Greek Orthodox and Anglican communities have also been riven in recent years by personal rivalries and financial irregularities. As a result the Christian Churches have not been able to achieve the kind of harmony or cooperation that would strengthen their presence in the area. Their disputes demonstrate that conflict grounded in religion—even ostensibly the same religion—is at best managed and contained, but rarely settled.

### The Christian Arab Community

There have been Christians in the Holy Land since the founding of the Jerusalem Church in the years after the death of Jesus as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles. Their heyday was the Byzantine period from the early fourth century until the mid-seventh century. Even after the capture of Jerusalem in 638 by the Caliph Omar at the head of a Muslim army, Christianity remained the predominant religion for the next two hundred years. With the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 Christianity again came to the fore. But in 1187 Saladin reconquered the city for Islam. Under the Mamlukes and Ottomans, Christians were second-class citizens, only coming into their own again when British General Edmond Allenby took Jerusalem from the Turks in 1917. In many ways the British Mandate (1922-48) was the golden age of Christianity in Jerusalem in the modern period, when Christians enjoyed official protection and patronage.

When the British left Jerusalem on May 14, 1948 there were 31,000 Arab Christians in the city, making up 20% of the population. Orthodox and Catholics were the largest communities, but there were also viable communities of Anglicans, Lutherans, and Syrian Orthodox. The separation of Mandatory Palestine into two states, Israel and Jordan, and the division of Jerusalem into eastern and western halves heralded lean times for local Christians. Mostly residing in Arab East Jerusalem the latter found themselves identified with the departed European empires. The ideologies of the 1950s that swept the Arab world, Nasserism, Communism, and Islamism, did not look kindly on the Christians in their midst.

King Hussein of Jordan was personally well disposed towards Christians and the Christian West. Britain and the United States were his close allies and one of his wives was an Englishwoman. But from the early 1950s there were manifestations of anti-Christian, Islamist sentiment in East Jerusalem. The city was neglected in favor of Amman, the capital of the Hashemite kingdom, economic opportunities were limited, and many young people emigrated. In 1963 the Latin (Catholic) patriarch, Archbishop Alberto Gori, told a British diplomat that he was

sorely troubled these days about the erosion of the Christian presence in Jerusalem and district... His Beatitude remarked that the Christian population of Ramallah, for example, had dropped since 1948 from 12,000 to 2,000. Bethlehem and Beit Jallah were becoming increasingly Islamicised. The Moslem Brotherhood were building Mosques everywhere in the Old City and were encroaching upon the

Christian places wherever they could.... There would have to be a new Crusade before very long.<sup>1</sup>

Archbishop Gori's testimony indicates that the precipitous decline in the local Christian presence occurred between 1948 and 1967, when Israel arrived. There was therefore an ambivalent response to the Israeli capture of East Jerusalem and the West Bank in the Six Day War. On the one hand this was deplored as an illegal occupation that was condemned from one end of the Muslim world to the other. Anything less than public support for the Palestinian cause might have dire consequences for Christians in the Arab world. On the other hand there were advantages that could not be spelled out in public. Economic prospects for Christians improved with the reunification of Jerusalem. Mandatory Palestine was restored as a single entity and with it Christian communities in the Holy Land reunited. Institutional Christianity in the shape of the major patriarchates—Greek, Latin, and Armenian—was relieved of the Islamist pressures that Archbishop Gori had complained of in 1963. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the most important single Christian institution in the region, was particularly grateful that its Hellenic character had been preserved by Israel from an Arab Orthodox takeover.

This period of economic and political stability came to a precipitous end with the outbreak of the first intifada or Palestinian uprising against Israel in 1987. Israeli occupation may have affronted Palestinian nationalism but it provided economic and social order. Palestinian authority in the West Bank after 1993, when the Oslo Accords were signed by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasir Arafat, brought economic distress, uncertainty, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Maitland to Parkes, Apr. 19, 1963, in Jane Priestland, ed., *Records of Jerusalem 1917-1971*, vol. 7, pp. 273-74, Oxford: Archive Editions, 2002.

renewed Christian emigration. In 1995 Israel handed Bethlehem over to the Palestinian Authority under an agreed schedule of withdrawals from the West Bank. This proved disastrous for local Christians. With the breakdown of the peace process in 2000 and the renewal of suicide bombings against Jewish West Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and other areas inhabited by Christians were cut off from friends and family in Arab East Jerusalem. First Israeli army checkpoints, later the security barrier, divided the Christian community into two.

Christians found themselves in the worst of both worlds, considered Arabs by the Israelis, and non-Muslims with Western affiliations by Palestinian Muslims. Even so, the number of Jerusalem Christians has remained stable at about 14,000. (Their percentage of the population has fallen as a result of their low birthrate. This is about 2.1 children per Christian woman compared to 2.9 for Jews and 3.9 for Muslims.) The major threat to Christian survival, however, is in the area controlled by the Palestinian authority.

The reality was spelled out in an interview given to *Corriere della Sera* by Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the custos or cleric in charge of the Custody of the Holy Land, the Franciscan organization that has been charged with defending the Christian Holy Places since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Asked about his problems with the Israeli authorities he responded with unusual frankness:

What do you mean by difficulties between Israel and the Vatican? We Christians in the Holy Land have other problems. Almost every day – I repeat, almost every day – our communities are harassed by the Islamic extremists in these regions. And if it's not the members of Hamas or Islamic Jihad, there are clashes with the 'rubber wall' of the

Palestinian Authority, which does little or nothing to punish those responsible. On occasion, we have even discovered among our attackers the police agents of Mahmoud Abbas or the militants of Fatah, his political party, who are supposed to be defending us.<sup>2</sup>

### The Non-Arab Christian Presence

Besides the Christian Arab community, Christianity is represented in Jerusalem by a significant non-Arab presence.

*Hebrew Christians:* There is a small community of perhaps one thousand Christians in Jerusalem who speak Hebrew and consider themselves an integral part of Israeli society. Because of the Arab-Israel dispute they mostly prefer to maintain a distinct identity apart from Palestinian Christians. Among them are Catholics, Evangelicals, and Baptists.

A Hebrew Catholic community meets regularly in the center of town and has Fr. David Neuhaus SJ, a converted Jew who grew up in South Africa, as its administering priest. Whereas Arab Catholics come under the parochial aegis of the Latin Patriarchate, Hebrew Catholics come under the authority of the Custody of the Holy Land.

An evangelical Hebrew community meets at Christ Church in the old British consular compound just inside the Jaffa Gate. Their church dates back to the 1840s, when Bishop Alexander, a Jewish convert to Anglicanism, sought to bring Jerusalem's Jews into the Church. Christ Church itself has some features of a synagogue and displays Hebrew texts from the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels. Traditional Jewish festivals are

---

<sup>2</sup> The article is provided in translation by Sandro Magister, "The Custody Must Be Doubled in the Holy Land," on his site [www.chiesa.espressonline.it](http://www.chiesa.espressonline.it), Sept. 7, 2005. See <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/38551?&eng=y>.

celebrated but given a Christian gloss. Congregants seem to have very little to do with the main Anglican presence in Jerusalem, focused on St. George's Cathedral beyond the Damascus Gate.

A third assorted group of Jews meets informally, often with evangelicals from abroad in private homes, to worship Jesus in a personal way while retaining Jewish customs and festivals.

Despite their attachment to Israel, Hebrew Christians maintain a discreet presence because of anti-Christian prejudices and occasional harassment on the part of the largely Jewish Orthodox population of the city. Some Hebrew Christians are Israeli-born converts, some converted outside Israel and saw their emigration to the Holy Land as a personal fulfillment, others are cradle Christians married to Jews. About 200,000 Christians, mostly with a Russian Orthodox background, came to Israel after the breakup of the Soviet Union. They may be the biggest single demographic boost that Christianity in the Holy Land has ever received.

*Armenian Orthodox:* The Armenian Orthodox community is one of the most venerable Christian communities in Jerusalem. Alongside Greeks and Latins they constitute one of the three "major communities" at the holy places enjoying historical rights of usage and possession. Armenian life in Jerusalem is focused on their ancient compound on Mt. Zion, in the southwest corner of the old city. This compound contains the cathedral of St. James, a convent, an important library owning priceless manuscripts, communal institutions, and the Armenian Patriarchate, which administers to the spiritual and welfare needs of local Armenians. It is also home to Armenian families, making for an unusually cohesive community.

After the First World War, and the Armenian genocide, when up to 1.5 million Armenians were massacred by the Ottoman Turks, many survivors sought sanctuary in Jerusalem. Speaking Arabic, Hebrew, English, and French, as well as their native Armenian, Jerusalem Armenians are a talented community with many connections to compatriots abroad, especially in Armenia, France, and the United States. Like other local Christians they have benefited from a sound education. Political and economic instability since the end of the British Mandate has encouraged many to emigrate in search of a better life. At its peak the community numbered thousands. Today they are down to fifteen hundred. Their dislocation from Armenians communities in neighboring Arab countries—Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan—as a result of the Arab-Israel conflict is a source of serious inconvenience.

*Foreign Religious:* Service in the Holy Land has always been a deeply significant vocation for Christian religious. As one Franciscan friar serving in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre once told me, “I am here because of the Incarnation.” At every turn the believing Christian walks in the footsteps of Jesus. Indeed, here and there along the Via Dolorosa you can see the original first century paving stones. Jerusalem is accordingly very much a city of churches and convents (a term applied in Jerusalem to closed communities of celibate religious of both sexes). Seminarians from all over the Middle East come to study in Jerusalem. Monks, nuns, and clergy of all denominations in their different habits are a colorful and characteristic feature of the Jerusalem scene. Besides parochial and devotional work, they are there to defend the rights of their Churches at the Holy Places. They also welcome pilgrims, and provide medical, welfare, and educational services to local people without religious preference. In the nineteenth century

institutional support and assistance, backed by funds from the great European empires, gave local Christians with their educational qualifications and languages a significant comparative advantage over local Muslims. This contributed inadvertently to the emigration of Christians, beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to South and North America.

Today there are estimated to be about 2,600 foreign religious in Jerusalem. Like other Christians their lives have been disrupted by the consequences of the second intifada and the counter-measures taken by the Israeli authorities to protect residents against suicide bombings. Most of the local communities are an integral part of wider regional Churches and in the past clergy freely travelled to and fro across borders with limited restrictions. For instance, the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, based in Jerusalem, serves a Holy Land province that includes Israel, Egypt, Cyprus, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. During the Ottoman period the Middle East was a single political entity. From 2001 the Israeli Ministry of the Interior and the security services tightened up the issue of visas and residence permits. For several years administrative delays and opaque procedures were a source of friction between the authorities and the Churches. At one point the United States government, encouraged by the Catholic Church, intervened to ease the situation. Recently the situation has somewhat improved.

*Pilgrims:* No survey of Christians in Jerusalem, however brief, would be complete without reference to the many pilgrims who visit the city. In 2008 there were about 1.8 million Christian pilgrims. Christian hostels in and around the Old City, often associated with a particular denomination—Swedish and German Lutheran, Armenian, Catholic, Anglican, and so on—cater for their needs. Increasingly, Israeli hotels are used by

burgeoning numbers of pilgrims. For Catholics and Orthodox the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, reached down alleys lined with souvenir shops, is a magnet. On any day a long line of people coils around the Edicule waiting to enter the small chamber containing the tomb of Jesus. Only four can enter at any one time.

Before the First World War Russian Orthodox pilgrims formed the majority. The Church of Alexander Nevskii, next to the Holy Sepulchre, contains a room dedicated to the memory of the Romanovs, the Russian imperial family murdered by the Bolsheviks. The Russian compound, not far from the New Gate into the old city, contains the Russian Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity and many fine nineteenth century buildings erected as dormitories for Orthodox pilgrims. A recent agreement between Israel and Russia has restored this property to the Russian government. After the Russian Revolution Orthodox pilgrimage largely dried up and Catholic pilgrims were in a majority. Today pilgrimage groups continue to arrive from all over the Catholic world, not only France, Spain, and Italy, but also South America and the Philippines. In recent years there has been a resurgence of Orthodox pilgrims from Russia, Serbia, and Romania. Greece and Cyprus are also well represented.

An important group of Christians rarely seen on pilgrimage are members of the Egyptian Coptic Church. In 1836 the Ethiopians lost control of their monastery and two chapels adjacent to the Holy Sepulchre to the Copts as the result of a plague that killed all the Ethiopian monks.<sup>3</sup> At Easter 1970 possession of the two chapels in the Holy Sepulchre complex was restored with the connivance of the Israeli authorities from the Copts to the Ethiopians. At the time Israel was waging a war of attrition against President

---

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Cohen, *Saving the Holy Sepulchre*, New York: Oxford U.P., 2008, pp. 194-200.

Nasser's Egypt along the Suez Canal and was eager to satisfy a long standing demand of Ethiopia, a strategic ally.

Still, the majority of Christian pilgrims coming to Jerusalem today belong to Evangelical Churches. They have their own special place of pilgrimage. Instead of the Holy Sepulchre they believe that Jesus' tomb should be located just outside the Damascus Gate at the Garden Tomb. Overtly sympathetic to Israel in its struggle with the Palestinians, evangelicals are represented in Jerusalem by an International Christian Embassy. It "was founded in 1980," in the words of its mission statement, "as an evangelical Christian response to the need to comfort Zion according to the command of scripture found in Isaiah 40:1-2: 'Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.'"

### Divisions among Christians

There have been disputes among the historical Churches represented in Jerusalem since time immemorial. Evidence of dissension between Greeks and Latins exists from the reign of Charlemagne in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Schism between the mother Churches over issues of authority, theology, liturgy, and culture is often dated to 1054. But in Jerusalem it is the indiscriminate massacre of the Orthodox population alongside Jews and Muslims by the Crusaders in 1099 that has stuck in the collective memory. The fierce contest over *praedominium* or primacy between the Latin and Greek Patriarchates began at this time. This took the form of competition, often violent, over rights of usage and possession at the Holy Places, particularly the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The deeper rivalry was over the two Churches'

respective claims to be the True Church, the repository of truth and authority, the successor to the Church of Saints Peter and Paul.

In 1757 the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate seized control of the Holy Sepulchre in a midnight raid when hundreds of lay parishioners forcibly overcame a handful of Franciscan friars. During the period of Ottoman decline Latins and Greeks were supported in Istanbul by their respective great power patrons France on the one side, and Russia on the other. When this confrontation threatened to drag the Sultan into war in 1852-53 he issued two imperial decrees prohibiting any change in the rights of the communities. A *Status Quo* arrangement has been in force ever since, freezing the situation on the ground. However disagreement between the communities over what this actually entails and the loss of authoritative Ottoman records have perpetuated competing claims. Since there is no provision for the legal settlement of disputes under a 1924 British order in council, disputes often drag on indefinitely.

Besides the well-known rivalry between Greeks and Latins, fierce conflicts also exist between Greeks and Armenians, Armenians and Syrian Orthodox, Copts and Ethiopians, and all the major communities—Greeks, Latins and Armenians—and Copts. Until his dismissal in 2005 former Greek Orthodox Patriarch Irineos was notorious for his erratic behavior, grounded in his wish to claw back what he believed to be Greek rights lost in the past. Various violent incidents occurred for which he was directly responsible. These included assaults on a Franciscan friar, who was kicked to the ground during the procession of the Cross; on the Syrian Orthodox bishop, who had his crosier broken on Calvary; and on the Coptic bishop, whose lectern and missal behind the Tomb of Christ were sent flying with a well-aimed kick. A separate dispute that has gained

attention in recent years is the feud between Copts and Ethiopians over possession of the Deir es-Sultan monastery.

With Archbishop Irineos's demotion and replacement by Archbishop Theophilos in 2005—an unprecedented move by the synods of the Church in Moscow and Jerusalem—relations between Greeks and Latins improved. Relations between Greeks and Armenians, however, have gone from bad to worse. Since 2002 there have been several brawls in a packed Church of the Holy Sepulchre during the ceremony of the Holy Fire on Holy Saturday of Easter Week. In a ceremony whose origins are lost in the mists of antiquity fire symbolizing the divine light present at the resurrection comes down from heaven to light the tapers of the Greek archbishop and an Armenian bishop praying together in the Tomb of Christ. The bone of contention, which both sides have argued over since at least the middle of the seventeenth century, is priority at the ceremony. Who has the right to receive the fire directly and who passes the fire to whom? Underlying this controversy is the Armenian insistence on their parity in the Church and the equal Greek insistence on their primacy as the sole legitimate heir of Byzantium. In this dispute, apparently, there can be no compromise.

Because of the divisions among the Churches they find it difficult to cooperate in matters of shared concern. Restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre took seventy years and much argument from the time of the 1927 earthquake that gravely undermined the edifice to the dedication of the decorated rotunda dome in 1997. Today they are unable to agree on the restoration of the roof of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. For years now rain has been coming into the basilica in winter and irreplaceable murals have been lost. Urgent repairs at the Holy Sepulchre await better days. These include

restoration of the Edicule, only standing because of a steel brace installed by the British in 1947; replacement of cracked paving; and renovation of the electricity, water, and sewage systems. The main latrines next to the northern courtyard are an insanitary disgrace. An agreement in principle to replace them was actually reached in 2007 but has not been implemented because of tense relations between Greeks and Armenians, and the failure to reach agreement with the Egyptian Copts. Since the Coptic patriarchate and their cathedral of St. Antony are adjacent to the church their consent is needed to install a new, essential sewage line. The major communities are not prepared to make the concessions demanded by the Copts—recognition of the Egyptians' status as a major community in the Holy Sepulchre.

Before the arrival of Israel disputes among the communities were contained (though not settled) by a non-judicial process of administrative regulation. The responsible official, usually the governor or district commissioner, would rule on a dispute after investigating customary practice under the *Status Quo*. The process was often contentious and protracted but usually worked and permitted the major project of restoration of the fabric of the Holy Sepulchre to be carried out. The Israeli authorities since 1967 have been reluctant to interfere in intra-Church disputes because of unease at the idea of Jews ruling on the rights of Christians. Israel is also suspected of favoring the Greeks over other communities, because of the Israeli wish to buy or lease land for building projects from the Greek Patriarchate, the greatest private landowner in the Jerusalem area. So Israel has offered to mediate or facilitate but not arbitrate various disputes such as that over the Holy Fire. Attempts at mediation have rarely succeeded.

In the absence of a satisfactory mechanism for settling disputes the authorities have limited themselves to policing the holy places to prevent actual clashes between the parties. They have done this effectively and do their best to persuade the contending parties to exercise restraint. Policing an ongoing dispute that may flare up at any time is, however, a poor substitute for the administrative rulings made by previous sovereigns—Turks, British, and Jordanians. The biggest failure of the Israeli authorities has been their inability to persuade the communities to install additional emergency exits in the Holy Sepulchre because of historical rivalries. Since Saladdin blocked eleven out of the twelve doors the church has only had a single entrance. On a normal day it contains hundreds of visitors at any one time, thousands at the ceremony of the holy fire, when naked flame is passed from candle to candle. No other meeting hall would be allowed to remain open in such circumstances. As a result, the police are obliged to restrict access by ticket to the church on Holy Saturday.

### Conclusion

Christianity in Jerusalem is debilitated by the Israeli-Palestinian dispute and its manifestations, such as the security barrier and travel restrictions, which cut Christian Arabs off from their hinterland in the West Bank. When there is hostility between Jews and Muslims, Christian Arabs find themselves caught in the crossfire. With their educational qualifications and middle-class aspirations it is not surprising that at times of economic and political hardship Christian Arabs should seek a better life abroad, as they have been doing since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

At the same time Jerusalem is a world heritage site in the fullest meaning of the term—a devotional and archeological treasure. Israel takes very seriously its obligation to ensure freedom of worship and has an obvious interest in promoting pilgrimage. On any given day there is an astonishing number of Christian services for people of every denomination under the sun. Pilgrims throng historic sites. Christian institutions function without impediment and enjoy the infrastructure and facilities of a modern city. Few would wish to return to the neglect of the Jordanian or Ottoman periods.

Division among the historic Churches remains a lamentable feature of Christianity in Jerusalem today. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre has become a symbol of religious immoderation. The squalor of the latrines and the unedifying spectacle of monks coming to blows are regularly reported in the world's media. A pilgrimage to the holy places should be a faith-affirming experience but too many people are repelled rather than uplifted by the lack of decorum. Negative publicity, the association of Christianity with intolerance and strife, embarrasses the Churches and broadcasts a message of Christian contention and disunity. Enemies of the Church rejoice and Christians everywhere shake their heads in dismay. The open display of rivalry does nothing to augment the pride and morale of local Christians or to strengthen cooperation among them. Speaking with one voice, the universal Church would be better able to defend its interests and improve the lot of local Christians.

In the final analysis, Christianity in Jerusalem reflects the low morale of the great historical Churches in the west, on which local churches have always been dependent.

The Franciscan custos has spoken of “psychological and spiritual tiredness.”<sup>4</sup> Russian Orthodoxy is booming in Jerusalem because it is booming in Russia. Besides continuing schism, noteworthy are the low Christian birth rate, the apologetic posture of the Churches in the face of militant Islam, and the tendency of local Christians to be punished for the sins of Europe and America. At the time of the Danish cartoons affair Christians were attacked and churches desecrated in Gaza and the West Bank. Peace in the Middle East would be a blessing for Jerusalem’s Christians as for all the city’s residents. But it will not be a panacea for this deeper loss of heart.

---

<sup>4</sup> Interview, May 24, 2004, carried by *Catholic Online*  
<http://www.catholic.org/featured/headline.php?ID=997>